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"DECEIVERS"

A Play in One Act

BY
WILLIAM C. DE MILLE

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DECEIVERS.

CHARACTERS.

AMOS LITTLE

FLORA LITTLE

PHIL. " *The Mink* "

SCENE:—A *Home in the Suburbs.*

TIME:—*The Present.*

SCENE:—A comfortably furnished living room—large windows back c. Door to bedroom L. 2 E. Door to hall R. 1 E. A piano is set diagonally in upper left corner. A small stand with practical electric lamp up c. in front of windows. Lamp is lit at rise. Library table R. c. with easy chair on each side—a lighted lamp on the table, also a telephone, books, magazines, box of cigarettes, ash tray, matches, etc. A small desk with papers, letters, etc. down L. in front of door.

AT RISE:—Curtain rises on empty stage. The 'phone is ringing—AMOS enters rather hurriedly from R. He is a rather small man of about 35 or 40—perhaps inclined to baldness—He wears a smoking jacket—He speaks over his shoulder out R. as he enters.

AMOS. All right, dear, I'll answer it—finish your desert—(*He picks up the 'phone and half sits on the table*) Hello— Yes, this is Amos Little— Oh, that you Harry— Hold the wire—just a minute—(*He puts down the 'phone, goes over to R. door which he closes carefully—then comes back and picks up the 'phone again*) Hello Harry—what to-night? Oh, pshaw—I promised to take my wife to the theatre— Five handed? Oh, I'll make six— Yes, but Flora— What?—I think she's getting wise to this night work at the office— Oh, well I'll take a chance—I promised her to give up Poker— All right—sure you can count on me—what is it—all Jacks? sure that's the best game— All right I'll be there in half an hour— Good-bye. (*As he hangs up the receiver the door R. opens and FLORA enters in evening dress*)

FLORA. Hurry up dear— You've just got time to change your clothes—(*Crossing L. to go to bedroom*) What was the 'phone?

AMOS. The office——

(*FLORA stops dead and eyes him.*)

FLORA. (*Sarcastically*) Oh—you've got to work to-night I suppose.

AMOS. Yes— It's hard luck—I'd been *counting* on taking you to the theatre.

FLORA. (*Dryly*) H'm—so had I.

AMOS. But business before pleasure—(*She eyes him intently—he gets uncomfortable*) What are you looking at me like that for?

FLORA. This is the second time this week you've broken a theatre engagement with me.

AMOS. Do you think I *enjoy* slaving away at the office?

FLORA. Last Saturday, you were at "the office" till four o'clock Sunday morning. Tuesday night

you came home from "the office" at three fifteen—
This is Thursday——

AMOS. (*Trying to bluff*) Look here, Flora, I don't like your tone.

FLORA. This is not the busy season——

AMOS. But I've told you—this war——

FLORA. (*Advancing a step*) Amos, where are you spending your nights?

AMOS. (*Sinking into chair L. of table*) Oh, Lord! This is the thanks I get for working my hands to the bone for——

FLORA. How is it I can't get you on the 'phone when you're at "the office?"

AMOS. The girl's not at the switchboard and——

FLORA. (*Alert*) Where is she then?

AMOS. At home and in bed——

FLORA. How do you know?

AMOS. I don't know—I——

FLORA. Then why—?

AMOS. Now for heaven's sake don't start that again— The idea—being jealous of a poor little 'phone girl——

FLORA. (*Tossing her head*) H'm——

AMOS. Would it make you feel any better to come with me? Would you like to sit in an empty office while I work on the books? If so come along. (*Rising*)

FLORA. Of course you'd stay while I was with you.

AMOS. Flora, I'm disappointed in you— You don't trust me any more— You're jealous.

FLORA. Why shouldn't I be? You're jealous enough of me—there's very little *I* can do that you don't want to know about.

AMOS. (*With dignity*) That's very different.

FLORA. Well, it's going to be different from now on. I'm tired of being left alone night after night—

AMOS. (*Losing his temper*) Well—what are you going to do about it?

FLORA. You'll see——

AMOS. Is that a threat?

FLORA. (*Facing him*) Yes.

AMOS. (*With great dignity*) Oh, very well. I shall change my coat and go to the office—perhaps when I return, you'll be yourself. (*He goes out L.*
FLORA *sits in chair L. of table— The 'phone rings—*
FLORA *answers it*)

FLORA. Yes— This is Mrs. Little—who—? the Detec—wait a minute— Hold the wire—(*Goes to door L. cautiously, closes it, then returns to the 'phone—speaking in lowered voice*) Hello, now—tell me—what have you found out? Sh—don't speak so loud—I don't want my husband to know I've put a detective on him— No—he'd never forgive me—but I *must* know— What! You can't report over the 'phone? I see— But I don't know you—I've only seen your chief— Oh, yes—(*AMOS opens door L.—the door closes—he enters quietly—hears the following words and stops—then goes up to end of piano where he is invisible to her, but in full view of the audience—FLORA doesn't see him—her back is toward the L.— She continues*) Well you'd better come here to-night— Yes—but be sure my husband doesn't see you— Yes, he'll be out—and I'll be alone— Yes it's better for you to come at night than in the daytime— The neighbors talk so—and a strange man coming here would make gossip, so I'd better *always* meet you at night—(*AMOS' face has changed from interest to amazement—from amazement to fury*) Oh, we'll have plenty of time— My husband never comes back before two or three o'clock— Now listen—when he leaves the house, I'll put out the lamp in the back window— Be sure you don't come until you see the lamp go out— All right—I'll expect you— Good-bye——

(*AMOS, during the last few words, has gone out*)

quietly, a picture of intense rage—FLORA hangs up the receiver and AMOS is heard singing in a very forced way— He re-enters L. making considerable noise.)

AMOS. (*Restraining his wrath—and speaking with repression*) Well, I'm off— What was the 'phone?

FLORA. Oh, nothing—a mistake.

AMOS. Flora, what did you mean when you said that you were tired of being left alone night after night?

FLORA. Never mind what I meant.

AMOS. But I *do* mind——

FLORA. All right—mind then— Good night.
(*She exits L.*)

(*AMOS goes over to door R.—goes out—a door slams outside— He re-enters at once—cautiously goes up and conceals himself behind the piano— He can appear at either end of the piano and be seen by the audience. FLORA enters cautiously, looks down hall R.—then puts out light up C.—stage lights do not go down— She exits L.— AMOS comes from behind upper end of piano— goes back to window and tries to see out—sees something and conceals himself again—PHIL, the Mink, appears outside windows. He uses a Jimmy to open the window softly and enters— goes to door L.—listens—then to door R.—then he examines drawers of desk L. He is a young, well set up chap, and doesn't look like a burglar— He is dressed in good business clothes— He makes himself at home—takes a cigarette from box on table and lights it—AMOS watching him from behind piano—FLORA enters— He hears her and turns— His hand goes to his pocket— He speaks quickly.)*

PHIL. Don't make a noise——

FLORA. (*Advancing*) Oh, it's all right, my husband has gone——

PHIL. (*Surprised*) Oh—has he indeed?

FLORA. I hope he didn't see you come in.

PHIL. I hope he didn't.

FLORA. Of course, I expected you—but my maid didn't tell me you had come— Did you 'phone from the drug store?

PHIL. Er— Yes—(*PHIL follows every move she makes with his eyes*)

FLORA. (*Coming down and facing him*) Well—

PHIL. Well——

FLORA. We'd better not delay— You must be gone when my husband returns.

PHIL. That suits me perfectly.

FLORA. Won't you sit down?

PHIL. Thank you—(*He waits for her to sit—She sits R. of table—he L.*)

FLORA. I'm afraid I'm rather embarrassed— You see I've never done anything like this before.

PHIL. (*Taking the cue*) Of course not—but now that you have begun——

FLORA. Oh, I shall see it through— My husband's conduct has made this necessary.

PHIL. Oh—yes—yes absolutely.

FLORA. I feel sure that he is deceiving me— otherwise I would never have asked you to—you understand.

PHIL. I don't blame you a bit— Excuse me— May I see your hand a moment—(*Rises and stands in front of table, leaning against it*)

FLORA. My hand? Why what——

PHIL. Just a moment—I'll show you—(*He takes her hand and looks at it intently*) Ah, these are very beautiful rings——

FLORA. (*Starting to draw away her hand*) Yes—but——

PHIL. (*Holding the hand*) Oh, it's a beautiful hand too——

FLORA. Really I——

PHIL. You know—I can see by your hand that I am going to acquire sudden wealth—(*Starting to take off her rings*) Allow me——

FLORA. (*Pulling her hand but not releasing it*) Look here—what do you mean? Let go my hand——

PHIL. A mere trifle I know—but they will remind me of you—please don't struggle.

FLORA. Oh, oh, I see— You're not the man I thought you were—you're a——

PHIL. Don't scream—(*He puts his hand over her mouth, holding her other hand—the struggle looks like an embrace—at this moment AMOS confronts them a pistol in his hand*)

AMOS. (*Covering them with his pistol*) So— This is what you meant——

(PHIL turns—sees he is covered and puts up his hands—FLORA rushes to AMOS.)

FLORA. Oh, Amos—Amos—protect me.

AMOS. (*Casting her off*) Protect you— Ha! This is a nice time to ask protection from me—(*To PHIL, who starts to lower his hands*) Keep your hands up.

FLORA. I'll 'phone for the police.

AMOS. Why?

FLORA. To turn him over—he's a burglar——

AMOS. Ha— The old story—I wonder how many trusting husbands have been fooled by it——

FLORA. But I tell you——

AMOS. Oh, you act it well—if I didn't know better I'd believe you even now— But I heard you making the appointment with him over the 'phone—I heard you tell him to wait till your husband was out—I saw you meet him—heard you tell him he had to be

gone when your husband returned and finally found you in his arms— Is that the way one receives a burglar?

FLORA. But—but—I——(*She is speechless*)

AMOS. If you didn't expect this man—whom did you expect?

FLORA. No one—that is— Oh, I won't be questioned like this—it's absurd—(*Starts to leave*)

AMOS. Stay here—(*She stops— To PHIL*) Now—what have *you* got to say for yourself?

PHIL. Not a word—I'm in the hands of Providence.

AMOS. I suppose you don't claim to be a burglar?

PHIL. (*Airily*) No, no, I make no claims whatever— There's evidently been a mistake made, so I'd better—(*Starts to go*)

AMOS. Stop—(*He keeps PHIL covered with the pistol*)

PHIL. Just as you like— Do you mind if I put my hands down?

AMOS. No—but don't make any quick movements.

(*PHIL puts his hands down.*)

FLORA. Amos, can't you trust me?

AMOS. Do you think I'm a fool?

PHIL. You don't have to answer that if you don't want to——

AMOS. (*To PHIL*) Now, I am going to have the truth from you. How long have you been her lover?

PHIL. Now look here, old man, that's not a fair question.

FLORA. Amos I—(*To PHIL*) Why don't you explain— Tell him you're a burglar——

AMOS. Do you think I'd believe him—now?

PHIL. (*To FLORA*) You see he wouldn't be-

lieve me— Of course, I'd like to do anything I could—but——

AMOS. I suppose I ought to kill you in your tracks.

PHIL. (*Conciliatingly*) Well, I don't know about that— In *my* opinion, you'd be making a great mistake.

AMOS. (*Dryly*) Oh, you think so, eh?

PHIL. Yes, yes, I'm sure of it— What good would it do?

AMOS. (*Between his teeth*) Wipe out the dishonor of my home.

FLORA. Amos, you're making a complete fool of yourself.

PHIL. (*Soothingly*) Well, he's excited just now— He'll be all right in a few minutes.

AMOS. You can't get away with this and you can't bluff me—I must know how long this has been going on— If you'll confess—I may let you go alive— after all, if I killed you, it would only make scandal.

PHIL. Absolutely— It would be the worst thing in the world for all of us.

FLORA. (*To PHIL*) Look here, Sir, I don't know your name, but you seem like a gentleman, tho you are a burglar.

AMOS. Yes—I've noticed that too, a little strange isn't it?

PHIL. Oh, not in these days.

FLORA. (*To PHIL*) Then I appeal to you as a gentleman— Don't you see the position you put me in by your silence?

PHIL. Yes, it *is* extremely awkward.

AMOS. Yes, *extremely* awkward.

FLORA. Then why won't you confess that you're a burglar, I'll see that no harm comes to you.

AMOS. Oh, no you won't—(*To PHIL*) If you stick to this burglar story of hers, you go to jail— understand?

PHIL. (*To FLORA—shrugging his shoulders*)
You see?

AMOS. Come—come— Choose— Tell me all that's passed between you and her, or I turn you over to the police.

PHIL. And if I tell you what you want me to— I'll get my head blown off—is that it?

AMOS. No—I'll give you your life—but I must know the truth.

FLORA. Oh, you idiot— How can he confess what isn't so?

AMOS. (*To FLORA*) He doesn't need any prompting from you. (*To PHIL*) Will you confess, or shall I—(*Reaches for 'phone*)

PHIL. (*To FLORA*) I'm afraid it's no use—I should like to protect your good name—but after all, he *saw* us didn't he? So we may as well own up—

FLORA. We—well of all the— Why I never saw you before—

AMOS. (*To FLORA*) You keep still—I'm getting the truth at last.

FLORA. But I— Oh—(*Sits in utter desperation*)

AMOS. (*To PHIL*) Go on.

PHIL. There's nothing more to be said—I admit we love each other—

FLORA. Oh— You— You wretch— You miserable liar—

PHIL. Of course, she doesn't seem to love me much at this moment—but—well—you know how women change—

AMOS. (*Letting his head sink*)— Yes—I know—I—I loved her myself—once.

PHIL. (*Very sympathetically*) It's cruel, isn't it? I make no excuses—only—don't be too hard on her— You know men and women can't always control their hearts—

AMOS. (*His rage changed into grief*) I know—

FLORA. Oh! You—you cowardly thief. (*To AMOS*) This has gone quite far enough— If you want to believe this man's lies—do so—but I'm going to call the police—(*Reaches for 'phone*)

PHIL. Stop her, man— (AMOS *does so*) If she tells the police this absurd story about my being a burglar—I shall have to let the whole world know the truth.

AMOS. Yes—you're right—(*Taking the 'phone from FLORA*) Put that down— This is terrible enough without making it public.

FLORA. But, Amos, his pretending to be my lover proves that he is a burglar—can't you see?

AMOS. No, I can't.

PHIL. Gently, brother; the lady's point is well taken— You see if I really *were* her lover, I would admit being a burglar and go to jail to save her. On the other hand, if I really were a burglar, I would admit being her lover and save myself— It's very perplexing; I don't blame you a bit for being puzzled.

FLORA. There, Amos, he admits that he is a burglar.

PHIL. Oh, no, I don't. You were entirely too eager to give me to the police— The minute we were caught your one thought was to save yourself. You would have had me languish in a dungeon cell, while you went free. In that moment, you killed in me every spark of love— You wouldn't lift your hand to save me, so why should I save you?

FLORA. Oh, I give it up—believe what you please Amos, I won't deny anything—(*Sits again*)

AMOS. (*To PHIL*) Go on—tell me the rest.

PHIL. Say, look here, old man, why make me tell all the painful details? I've told you what you wanted—now let me go and I'll try to forget her. (*Starts to go*)

AMOS. (*With pistol*) Stop! (*PHIL stops*) The story doesn't end here— If I spare your wretched life, you've got to do the square thing by her— After the—the divorce, you must marry her.

FLORA. What!

PHIL. I shall be delighted.

AMOS. I have your word?

PHIL. If she wishes it— Yes.

AMOS. (*Pointing to door R.*) Then go—
(*Pockets his pistol*)

PHIL. Thank you—(*Starts to go—FLORA gets between him and the door*)

FLORA. Stop— You—you can't leave me in this false position. If you go like this, he'll always believe—what he does now—(*To AMOS*) I can't stand this, Amos, the man you heard me 'phoning to was a detective—I've had you shadowed—to find out the truth. The detective was to come here to-night—when I found this man in the room I thought it was the detective. There—now you know the truth—(*To PHIL*) Oh, please, please, have the decency to save my reputation—

PHIL. (*Covering AMOS with a pistol which he takes from his pocket*) Certainly, I never could resist beauty in distress— Keep quiet brother and don't make any sudden motions— The lady is perfectly right—I am a burglar.

AMOS. (*Turning to FLORA*) And you put a detective on me, eh? You treated your own husband as if he were a criminal.

FLORA. (*Going to him*) Forgive me, Amos, I was mad with jealousy—I didn't believe you spent the nights working at the office.

AMOS. And you are the woman who swore to love and honor me— You suspect me of lying to you—of deceiving you—when I am sitting night after night over my desk, working to give you comforts—working until my eyes close with fatigue and I sleep in my chair—working until—(*'Phone rings*)

PHIL. Don't move please—(*Keeping them covered with the pistol he answers the 'phone from chair R. of table*) Oh— Hello— Yes this is Mr. Little's house. Mr. Little can't come just now—I'll take the message— Oh, it's all right—I'm an intimate friend

—I see— Yes— Yes, all right I'll tell him— Good-bye. (*Hangs up and turns to AMOS*) Mr. Jack Evans says you are to hurry up and that Billy just held four aces.

FLORA. (*Recoiling from AMOS*) Jack Evans! Four aces— So *that's* the way you work your fingers to the bone to give me comforts.

AMOS. But my dear—

FLORA. Bah— Don't speak to me—(*Starts to go*)

PHIL. One moment—(*Keeping them both covered with the pistol*) Kindly stand perfectly still—both of you—I'm glad I came to-night— You two people really love each other, but you are both absurdly jealous and each of you has been deceiving the other—(*Going to FLORA*) Your rings, please.

FLORA. But—

PHIL. Please. (*Under compulsion from the pistol, she gives them to him*) My dear children, love never thrives on deceit. Trust each other and you will be happy. Now the necklace—(*He gets it and turns to AMOS*) You see, honesty is the best policy—(*While talking he goes through AMOS's pockets, taking pistol, watch, pin, pocketbook, fountain pen, knife, loose change, etc.*) You must have faith in each other. Let him play a game of poker occasionally. If he had played to-night he'd have lost less than he's losing now. (*To AMOS*) But don't tell her you're working at the office— That's not honest—it's not fair to her—and Oh!—it's so old! That's all you've got to remember— Honesty—it's the thing that makes life worth living— An honest man fears nothing—he can look the world in the eyes—I'm going to leave you now—(*He takes the 'phone and jerks it loose, leaving it on the table. A ring is heard at the door bell r.*) There's your detective— If you will both wait in here, I'll let him in— But I'm sure you won't need him now.

In here please—(*He puts them out L.*) I'll send him right in here— He can let you out—and remember—*Honesty*—(*He closes and locks the door L., leaves key on table. Ring repeated at bell R. He takes another cigarette from table, lights it—AMOS bangs on door L. PHIL calls to him*) Tell the detective the key is on the table— Good-night——

(*Banging continues L. Ringing repeated R. PHIL exits jauntily R.*)

CURTAIN.

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